

# Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge

## *Visitor Opportunities*

Located within a two hour drive to 1.6 million residents of southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina, the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge is a wonderful place to visit to experience a wildlands environment. With 111,203 acres of wetland forest and the 3,100 acre Lake Drummond at its center, the refuge contains some of the most important wildlife habitat in the mid-Atlantic region.

Refuge trails are open year round, Sunday through Saturday, sunrise to sunset unless otherwise posted. More information can be obtained at the refuge office, Monday-Friday, 7:30 am to 4:00 pm (**only** the office is closed on weekends and federal holidays).

Visitors to the refuge may participate in a variety of activities including hiking, biking, nature photography, wildlife observation, hunting, fishing and boating. The refuge was established for the purpose of protecting and managing the swamp's unique ecosystem which includes wildlife and habitat. Therefore, portions of the refuge may be periodically closed to public use activities in order to accomplish this objective.

### Hiking/Biking

The refuge offers four entrances from which visitors will find miles of trails for exploring. Trail heads are located in the Jericho Ditch, Washington Ditch (both located

on White Marsh Road in Suffolk, Virginia) and Railroad Ditch (located on Desert Road in Suffolk, Virginia) entrances where a variety of unpaved ditch roads provides opportunities for hiking and biking. The Feeder Ditch entrance (from the east located on the Dismal Swamp Canal in Chesapeake, Virginia) is a water only access route to Lake Drummond—see Fishing/Boating opportunities.

Most often recommended for hiking and biking is the Washington Ditch Trail, a 4 1/2 mile dirt road to Lake Drummond and the elevated wooden Dismal Town Boardwalk Trail, located adjacent to the Washington Ditch parking area. The boardwalk trail meanders for a mile through a representative portion of swamp habitats. Located at this entrance are vault restrooms and a large parking area that can

accommodate full size buses.

At the Jericho Ditch entrance you will find a more primitive setting but with four trails to consider. South Jericho Ditch and Lynn Ditch are favored by birding enthusiasts. Or you may prefer to be challenged by the loop of north Jericho-Williamson-New-Hudnell Ditches (approximately 6 miles). Parking is available at the trail head two miles in from White Marsh Road.

Auto access to Lake Drummond is only available through the Railroad Ditch entrance. A day pass is necessary and can be obtained from the refuge office on business days from 7:30 am to 2:30 pm. This entrance also serves as access to the Interior Ditch boat ramp—see Fishing/Boating opportunities.

**New in 2006** is the West Ditch Boardwalk Trail. The 100 yard



wooden trail offers wildlife viewing opportunities in a typically flooded wetland environment. The trail is located in the Railroad Ditch entrance on West Ditch Road.

*Special Note: For 2007 vehicle access to Lake Drummond via the Railroad Ditch is on a day to day basis due to forest management activities in the corridor. Please call the refuge office on the day of your visit to check permit availability.* When open, the entrance can accommodate groups limited to a 25 passenger size vehicle or less, by special permit only.

### Fishing/Boating

Fishing and boating are permitted year-round on Lake Drummond with access via the Feeder Ditch, connecting Lake Drummond with the Dismal Swamp Canal. A public boat ramp is located north of the Feeder Ditch on the Dismal Swamp Canal. Boats must be small enough to portage around the water control structure near the lake or to be lifted by electric tram to the higher level of the Lake. Lift weight is restricted to a maximum of 1,000 lbs. Vessels are limited to 25 hp on the Lake. If fishing, a Virginia fishing license is required.

Boating access at the Interior Ditch boat ramp is by special permit during the fishing season, weekends only, April 1 to June 15. Additional information is available from the refuge office.

### Educational Opportunities

A refuge orientation is available for organized school, scout, civic, and professional groups by advance reservation. A typical visit would include a 15 minute orientation at

either the refuge headquarters (group size limited to a maximum of 40), or at either the Washington Ditch or Jericho Ditch trail heads (recommended for larger groups) followed by a teacher led activity, or auto access to Lake Drummond through the Railroad Ditch entrance (see Special Note in Hiking/Biking).

Reservations for orientations may be made by contacting Visitor Services at the refuge headquarters. Off-site orientations are limited to staff availability. On site orientations and vehicle access are not available on weekends or federal holidays.

*Other Resources:* A video and suggested activities/lessons guide addressing state science academic standards are available at no cost for school and scout groups.

### Hunting

A white-tailed deer hunt is held on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays for five weeks during the months of October and early November. Additional entrances are added for the deer hunt, Portsmouth Ditch (located on Martin Johnson Road in Chesapeake, Virginia) and Corapeake Ditch (located on Desert Road in Gates County, North Carolina). A black bear hunt is held on two days in December. Special permits are required. Portions of the refuge are closed to other public use activities on hunt and scouting days. Additional information is available from the refuge office or on the refuge web site.

### Camping/Picnicking

Camping is prohibited on the refuge. However, a primitive campground, referred to as the

“Reservation” is operated by the US Army Corp of Engineers at the Lake Drummond/Feeder Ditch spillway, approximately 3.5 miles from the Dismal Swamp Canal Boat Ramp. This is wilderness camping. Access is by water only and camping is on a first-come basis. There are several picnic tables, two screened rooms, free-standing grills, and designated fire pits. A restroom is open from late March to early November. Bring your drinking water and firewood needs. Insect repellent is strongly recommended during the summer months. Boating on Lake Drummond is sunrise to sunset only. Swimming in the lake is prohibited.

There are no designated picnic areas or facilities on the refuge lands.

### For your safety:

- Remain on designated trails at all times.
- Insect repellent suggested during warm seasons.
- Cell phone coverage is limited.
- Pets must be leashed at all times.
- Collecting is not allowed.
- No pier or ditch fishing.
- Swimming is prohibited.
- Trails are open sunrise to sunset, or as otherwise posted.
- Contact refuge office for other regulations.

**Great Dismal Swamp  
National Wildlife Refuge**  
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[www.fws.gov/northeast/greatdismalswamp](http://www.fws.gov/northeast/greatdismalswamp)

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